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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Ghassan Tueni
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
17-18 March 1998
Beirut, Lebanon

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Jean Krasno (JK): For the record, Ambassador Tueni, would you explain something about your background, where you were born and educated, and where you began your role with the UN?

Ghassan Tueni (GT): Yes, I was born in Lebanon in 1926 and I my higher studies were done at the American University in Beirut and I graduated with a BA in Philosophy in 1945, June 1945, and I had done my secondary studies mostly at the French section of the American University in Beirut, hence I can speak in both... I learned both languages, French and English, over and above my Arabic language, which was my national language. I then went to Harvard University with the hope of acquiring a Doctoral degree, which I failed to complete because my father died and I had to come back and take over the family business, which is the newspaper where we are sitting today. I finished with an MA in government and I was hoping to write a dissertation on political philosophy, particularly the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. I think this is all you need to know!

Now, I was not really preparing to become a journalist, which I am, and which I inherited. I was hoping to return to America and go into teaching. I had another choice, which was to join the foreign service of my country, but family imperatives forced me to stay and I have been in this business for 50 years now. But during the 50 years, I have

had numerals intervals in public life. I was elected a Member of Parliament a few years, a very few years after I came back from America, and then I was in another mandate of the House, and Deputy Speaker of the House, a Ministry position, and then I became a member of the Cabinet in 1970 for a short while. I resigned that and then I went to the UN on a number of missions, mainly in 1967 when the first Arab-Israeli war broke, because I had been a war correspondent. This was my first assignment as a journalist, I went with the Arab forces into Palestine right after the partition, and while the partition was taking place. Then I remained here and I became another, finally member of government in 1975, for a number of years, two years really, until 1977. This was the conclusion of the first phase of our war, quote 'civil war,' (which it wasn't). There was a change of President in 1977 and the new President sent me as Ambassador to the UN in September 1977. I stayed there until September 1982, and resigned when a new term began in the mandate of the President, President Elias Sarkis, so I served at the UN for six solid years. And I returned here and I have been working as a journalist with a short *intermezzo* as political advisor to the President, who was President between 1982 and 1984.

JK: OK, excellent. That's...

GT: But I never interrupted my interest and my work as a journalist, even when I was in New York.

JK: Even when you were in New York.

GT: Yes.

JK: Well, I'd like to actually start with the time that you spent in New York, and then maybe go forward and take a look at the history as well.

GT: I hope you are going to concentrate on New York and the UN?

JK: Yes, absolutely. That's what we will look at first.

GT: That will be a nice case. OK.



UNITED NATIONS

JK: So, you were at the UN at the time of the writing of the Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426, which created UNIFIL.

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GT: Yes.

JK: Can you give a little bit of background on leading up to that, and what meetings took place and how those resolutions evolved?

GT: Sure. The background is very, very important, and I will assist on two things.

The first is that the Lebanese borders were the only borders with Israel where there was no UN presence of any form, with the exception of UN observers, truce observers. This

is the organization that was really observing the implementation of the armistice of 1948. But it wasn't operative and the Lebanese-Israeli border was the only border where there was active movement, namely active warfare--not really full-fledged warfare but ins-and-outs of Israel and various acts of aggression and acts of violence on the border. Whereas there was none of this on other Arab borders, with the exception of the war of attrition on the Egyptian border, and one or two operations in Jordan. But this was the most constantly active border. So much so that many of us had considered using the word that the Lebanese borders were "summing up" Arab wars against Israel. And this despite the fact that Lebanon was the only country that hadn't declared war on Israel, and was the most pacific, peace-loving country, etc. etc. This is one part of the background. And we did not take an active part in the 1967 war, after which Israel declared the armistice agreement of 1948 as finished, as 'obsolete' to use the legal term. We never accepted the theory that the armistice agreement had ceased existing, legally at least.

The second background is that when I got to New York in September 1977, there had been acts of aggression against Lebanon from Israel, and the very first meetings that I had with the responsible people in the Secretariat and with some delegates of countries particularly concerned, a point on the agenda was 'can we, in some way, bring UN forces on the Lebanese border.' And what was decided was to increase the UNTSO, the Observers Corps, the observers were anyway not active so there was no use in increasing their number. Putting UN soldiers on the Lebanese border was one of the most important issues in Lebanese politics. There was a deep cleavage between various opinions and factions in Lebanon: those that wanted the UN forces to enforce or preserve some form of peace, and why should there be war?

Now, one has to bear in mind that Lebanon is the country that received, second to Jordan which was more or less a continuation, a geographical continuation of Palestine, Lebanon was the country that received the largest contingent of Palestinian refugees in 1948, and still another important contingent in 1970, who came from Jordan after Black September. And we were naturally, in Lebanon, much against our will, but there was a movement of enthusiasm for them. We were naturally, what I have done very often and I can claim the copyright, a diaspora in revolt. Nowhere else was the Palestinian diaspora in revolt, armed--armed to the teeth, very well equipped with heavy equipment, and the Palestinian camps had turned into, really, military contingents. The Lebanese government had signed, or was forced to sign, with Israel, with the Palestinians, in 1968, a so-called Cairo agreement because it was signed in Cairo, enumerating the relations between the Palestinians, namely the Palestinian guerrillas because they became guerrillas really, and the Lebanese government, the limits of Lebanese sovereignty and whether we give them any extra-territoriality on Palestinian authority inside the camps. And is there a Ho Chi Minh trail by which they can go towards the Israeli border and shoot their rocket or go into Israel and conduct operations.

JK: Now, you say that you were forced into this agreement, the Cairo agreement.

GT: Yes.

JK: In what way? What were the pressures on Lebanon?

GT: Well, two sides of pressure. First, the power that the Palestinians had acquired inside Lebanon, a solidarity almost universal but certainly a majority of people who were seduced by the Palestinian revolution, who thought that the revolution was really going to bring back the stolen land to the Palestinians or take back the Palestinians into Palestine. And the Palestine Liberation movement, the PLO, which had its constituency all over the world, had the highest constituency in Lebanon. Secondly, it infiltrated inside Lebanese politics and had become a platform for opposition, for a certain opposition, and a reinforcement of Muslims against Christians. The Lebanese society is a confliction society, it is plural or pluralistic, and it was easy to infiltrate into this confliction society, etc., etc. So, we were forced by both the acquired position of the Palestinians inside Lebanon, and their allies, public opinion, etc., and the support they were getting against the Lebanese government whenever the Lebanese government said "OK--you stop here, you are violating the law, you are creating problems for Lebanon." The Arab countries were all to happy that the Palestinians were operating from Lebanon and not from their own country, and they were sending arms, particularly Syria--and I am not sending an accusation here, I am only repeating what Syria itself acknowledged, with a certain sense of pride, that they were arming the camps. The Palestinians didn't have the means of buying all the hardware or armaments that they had. These were given to them by Syria, Libya, Iraq, Egypt, everybody--wittingly, knowing that they probably would be used against the Lebanese, but so what? Nobody was concerned that this was weakening the Lebanese state, because the Lebanese state was not very popular with other Arabs all the time.

JK: So, there was pressure from within and without.

GT: There was pressure in, and once there was a major class between the Palestinians and the Lebanese army, the Arabs sent a good-will mission here and under the chairmanship of the Secretary General of the Arab League and six foreign ministers, et cetera, et cetera, and we had to sign the Cairo agreement in 1968. But the Cairo agreement was not operative. By the time we signed it the Palestinians had over flooded the camps and their presence all over the country was notorious and there were new clashes. At one time, paradoxically, implementing the Cairo agreement was a Lebanese demand rather than a Palestinian demand. We wanted them to return to the limits of the Cairo agreement. We would be glad if we could limit them to the Cairo agreement. And the so-called civil war of 1975 was born from the clash between Palestinians and Lebanese. So, this is the background.

JK: OK. That's the background.

GT: Against this backdrop, I went to the UN. Lebanese diplomacy was totally crippled, and this is why they chose a politician, if you wish, or a man of politics, and information, rather than a career diplomat, because he would enjoy greater authority, more freedom of action, probably will be more detached in talking to the Palestinians at the UN, and to the Arabs, and trying to say, once again, or say again, "Lebanon is my country, not yours, and we decide what we want to do. You don't decide." When we got there, what to do about Lebanon was decided by the Arab group. So, well, the question

of bringing UN forces to Lebanon before the Israeli invasion of 1978 was discussed--in great secrecy, but it was discussed. And even then I could not get any real backing of the Lebanese government to ask for UN troops on the border, despite the mounting pressure for this in some Lebanese circles particularly the leader of the Christian opposition, Raymond Eddé, who was all the time clamoring that we should have 'blue helmets' as he called them.

JK: OK, so that was the group that favored the UN.

GT: Yes, surely.



JK: So, what were the reasons that that group favored having the UN?

GT: Because they wanted to stop the clashes on the border.

JK: OK.

GT: The theory of it, the mathematics of it, if you will, the numbers were this: we had come to the point where it was the backlash from Israel on Lebanese villages, etc., etc., including an air-raid on the Lebanese airport, was more costly to Lebanon than were the Palestinian attacks on Israel. So, say we would shoot a rocket into Israel: it had a tremendous useless value, there is not peace in northern Israel, but Israeli retaliation was so much, in total disproportion, and it was very costly. It was destroying Lebanese

villages, Lebanese homes, Lebanese houses. And there was a new wave of refugees, the Palestinians had already been refugees from Palestine, and they were now getting into Beirut because they didn't want to stay in the camps and be receiving this retaliation. But Lebanese as well were immigrating, and the whole Lebanese society was disrupted and there were tremendous economic problems. Lebanon was really falling apart.

JK: So, what groups didn't want the UN on the border?

GT: Well, the more out-spoken pro-Palestinians. They thought "so what? This is war against Israel. Let's wage it for all we've got." And there was a slogan--which was utterly stupid--said by some Palestinians: "Why should we worry about Beirut being destroyed when Haifa, and Jerusalem have been destroyed already? One more city--so what? This is a war of liberation, it's going to be forever. Whatever." This whole romantic... this was the era of romantic liberation movements.

JK: Yes, right. So, then, what transpired at New York, at UN headquarters, in these discussions?

GT: Nothing much. There was this discussion and then it was shelved. But it wasn't really shelved because it stayed in the background until March 14th 1978, or March 15th, when there was this major operation by the Palestinians in Tel Aviv, which was the first really military operation--because a group of Palestinians disembarked on Israeli soil, in Tel Aviv, and went hunting. There was the bus attack and 34 or so were killed, and

Israel, we knew, would retaliate. Which it did. And as usual, Israeli retaliation was not commensurate with the attack--it was much more. And I can't believe for a moment that in 24 hours they planned and carried the so-called Litani operation. This must have been their contingency plans. They were waiting for an occasion. And they invaded Lebanon up to the Litani river. We believe that this is in Israeli '*dans le sous-conscient Israeli*' in the Israeli subconscious. This was the implementation of a long-standing claim, and dream, namely to get to the waters of the Litani. When the borders of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria was drawn, the Israelis, or the Jewish agency, was very displeased and there were memoranda by Weizmann and others saying that if Israel is to be given means of livelihood for the future, a Jewish home was to be given means of livelihood, it had to have the Litani water and south Lebanon. They never accepted the border between Lebanon and Palestine.

JK: So, water becomes a very key issue.

GT: Sure, water was already a key issue, and it was unveiled or confirmed by the fact that they named their operation of retaliation Operation Litani.

JK: Operation Litani. So then, with this...

GT: Litani is the name of the major river.

JK: Of the river, yes.

GT: Yes.

JK: With these things happening on the ground here in Lebanon, how did that affect New York, what was going on in New York?

GT: Not much. My instructions, or let's say my line of conduct, which was approved by the President here and the Foreign Minister to a great extent. The President had greater leeway and wanted more but the Foreign Minister had to play balance politics. The instructions were that we a) should recapture Lebanese initiative at the UN, and be our own captain of the ship, and try to see how we could salvage as much as we can of Lebanese integrity and independence, freedom of action, and try and see how we can involve the UN in reducing tensions and somehow acquiring for Lebanon a certain measure for peace. I was getting there after the first phase of the war; Lebanon had been witnessing, or had been the theater from 1975 to 1978, of major confrontations between Palestinians and Lebanese factions, which had divided the country and created two governments, etc., etc.

JK: Now, at the same time in 1978, the Camp David accords were coming together.

GT: Not the same time--after.

JK: After. But the preliminaries were coming together.

GT: Yes. The preliminaries. Yes.

JK: How did that event then have an effect on Lebanon?

GT: It did. But first let us talk about Resolution 425.

JK: OK.

GT: There was the invasion. And the natural thing was to go to the Security Council. Lebanon was hesitant to go to the Security Council, and we hesitated for 24 hours, not really assessing what the importance of the invasion was. Whereas there was this drive by Arab opinion and the Arab states and Arab ambassadors of the UN, "we'll go to the Security Council and yell as usual." And my government's policy and my policy, it was more or less that this is a time where form was of the essence, form was of the essence, depending on how we played. We played it very loud, and I said, "OK, this is the time for us to get a Security Council resolution which is action-oriented." We didn't want rhetoric. We have a collection of rhetoric resolutions, condemning Israel, calling for peace and withdrawal from occupied territories, etc., etc. And there were two tendencies inside the Arab group, the group of Arab ambassadors, which was a mirror of the Arab states, their governments. One tendency was to use violent condemnation of Israel. And the tendency of Lebanon--with the support of some Arabs, but fair to middling--was to try and see how we can use this window of opportunity into structuring a new practical

situation on the border. And I won. I mean, I said, “Look, if you want, you introduce a resolution.” I told the Egyptians and the Syrians, who were yelling very loud, “you introduce a resolution in the Security Council, asking for the condemnation of Israel, but my instructions are to introduce a resolution... to see to it--I could not--introducing a resolution that would bring forth the withdrawal of Israel and the establishment of peace on the border--not a peace agreement with Israel – reinstating the armistice between Israel and Lebanon.”

JK: Now, what countries were on the Security Council that you could work with in order to write this?



GT: I hoped I could work with the Kuwaiti because he was the Arab group representative, but he wasn't really... we weren't seeing eye-to-eye, because a Kuwaiti has to have an eye on Palestinian and Arab opinion. Now, Arab opinion is usually with the more extreme, not with the more modest or moderate. So, he was wavering between supporting the point of view of the Lebanese government, but not forgetting what the Palestinians wanted. Now, my most difficult point was to deal with the Palestinian representative. He was not on the Security Council but he was there, as an observer, and he had by virtue of the rules of order the right to come to the Security Council and talk. In terms of governments, the nearest two governments to us were of course the Americans and the French. The French by tradition; the Americans because they were the most important, and they were concerned about establishing peace. And I had no conflicts in working with the Americans. Andrew Young was the ambassador and he had

an excellent deputy, Chief of Mission, who was an Orientalist, an Arabist, a specialist in Arab affairs, James Leonard.

JK: Oh, James Leonard, sure.

GT: So, we worked very closely and they had a team of great experts, and of course the government here, the Foreign Minister here, was discussing with the American ambassador and the French ambassador. The French were all along supporting us fully. And I could not really get away with asking for UN troops myself, but I think the Americans played it very subtly, and we agreed finally that they would sponsor the resolution. And Andrew said in his speech that this was the first resolution that the US was sponsoring on the Middle East and getting away with, because usually their resolutions were vetoed by the Russians and shot down by the Arabs. There was a problem talking to the Russians. We had long talks with the Americans, both in Beirut and in New York, and I suspect in Washington as well. I was talking to Washington as well. And the French. And our Paris people were very active.

We finally came to the following agreement. The Americans would introduce a resolution, and in my speech at the Security Council I would indicate that we were prepared to receive UN forces, to accept UN forces. So, I would not really request UN forces, I would not have the right as a non-member to initiate the resolution. The resolution was an American draft, but negotiations proceeded. And we caught a marvelous period, because this was when there was a *rapprochement* between the US and Moscow, so the Russians were willing to come along. They had their say on the drafting

and the wording of the resolution. They could not vote for, because of their long-standing problem with the UN Secretariat on how much money they owed and they did not want to be involved in financing the force. So, they said, "We will abstain, but we will support it." And they spoke in support of the resolution. The resolution was voted unanimously. The British was splendid of course; the President of the Security Council was the British delegate, and he was a Parliamentarian as well, and I was very grateful for that. So, this is important because I could talk to him, from a Parliamentarian to a Parliamentarian, to apply different tools. At one time--because the war was still going on, and everybody was making long speeches, they had a list of 14 speakers to go--so I suggested that since we detected an agreement on the resolution, why didn't we have a vote and ask the Secretary-General to implement the resolution, and then carry on the speeches during the night--which is what happened. So, the Security Council was meeting, while the war was going on, while the Israelis were still advancing, killing, destroying, etc., etc., capturing people. We voted the resolution, we asked the Secretary-General to go along and implement it, which he did. And then we went on speaking for the whole night--because, you know, a speech by a member of the Security Council is very important. The speaker presents his country's position, not to influence the vote. And then they had to speak in explanation of the vote, which was another procedure, a very lousy procedure, full of frustration, because it gives you time to make two speeches and they are all boring because they are conventional speeches. I spoke for five minutes, three minutes.

So, then we had to write the rules, the terms of reference of the force. And we asked the Secretary-General to go and prepare the report, come back for the draft, discuss it with us, namely with all the members of the Security Council, and the two parties

concerned. Now, the Israelis took a very negative stand, they spoke violently against the resolution, they were against the intervention of the Security Council, against the formation of a force, against sending troops to Lebanon, and they were contending that in fact they were in agreement with the Lebanese, that they were there to chase out the Palestinians, to defend Israel, and that what they were doing was really rendering a service to the Lebanese--which is a logic that did not hold its ground and did not get them the vote. So, there was a unanimous vote against Israel, because the Israelis were pleading... they had a very, very eloquent man; I was no measure to him. He later became the President of the Israeli Republic, Chaim Herzog. He later became President and was very, very articulate. And he had a number of tricks in his bag: he produced a batch of telegrams of support for the Israeli army from a village. I happened to know the village, and he had more signatures than there were inhabitants in that village--which I said to the Council and they laughed, like you did. And then I showed from the *New York Times* photographs of the Israelis with Lebanese in that village, hands tied behind their backs, blindfolds over their eyes, et cetera, and with Israeli soldiers playing violin while the boys were thrown down. And I said, "Are these the people who sent your telegrams of support, Mr. Herzog?" It was Mr. Herzog--Chaim Herzog. Anyway, these are the little remembrances, the stuff that stayed with me for... what is it now? Twenty years.

JK: So, when you say 'unanimous,' the Soviets abstained. Did any other countries abstain?

GT: I think China did not take part in the vote.

JK: China just didn't take part in the vote.

GT: So they acquiesced. Everybody else voted.

JK: Now, the resolution was in two parts, 425 and then 426.

GT: 426 was a mandate to the Secretariat, to the Secretary-General, as in charge of the forces, with the terms of reference and the guidelines for the force, and it is the more important resolution in practical terms, because this is what defined what was going to happen. But 425 was the political decision. It was clear that a) total respect for the internationally recognized boundaries--and my god, it took hours to negotiate that one line, because there was no recognition of an internationally recognized boundary of Lebanon by Israel because they thought that those boundaries should be flexible, etc., etc. So, establishing this principle was very important, and many Lebanese common people said that this was the second declaration of independence for Lebanon, because this was the whole of the Security Council, confirming the borders of Lebanon with Israel.

JK: So, Lebanon wanted that language.

GT: Yes, of course. And then, withdrawal, "forthwith," which is immediate--cessation of all hostilities, and then the creation of a force, and the mandate of the force.

JK: In the arguments about that language, what countries were opposed to specifically that language?

GT: The Russian trend was to be stronger against Israel, and not to have anything that could be used against the Palestinians, within the back of their minds, probably, the possibility of allowing the hostilities to go on harassing the Israelis, and so were the Syrians of course. But the creation of the area of operation was important because we wanted the area of operation to be the total area where there were problems, confrontations between Lebanese and Israelis, and Lebanese and Palestinians. A little area was left north of the blue line, north of the border of the area of operation, which became a no-man's-land, the Lebanese army could not get to it, the Arab-Lebanese force that was present in Lebanon could not get to it or would not get to it because the Syrian decision was negative. And it had become really the seat of the extremes of the Palestinian factions, who went on harassing Israel. I cannot believe that this was missed-- I believe that there was a will and probably a meeting of an objective alliance of interests between the Israelis and Syrians and Palestinians that we should leave a line issue, susceptible way of being, of igniting further conflict, which was the case. Because the Israelis never wanted really to withdraw and that gave them, really, the alibi to stay. Maybe the Syrians didn't want them to withdraw either--I don't know. Because if they withdrew and there was really a strong presence of UNIFIL, then the war in the Lebanon would end and the Syrians would have to withdraw.

JK: Now, the United States, as you say, sponsored the resolution.

GT: Yes. Introduced and then sponsored.

JK: Introduced and then sponsored. I understand that the US was very anxious for some kind of action to be taken on the issue, particularly involving Israel, because they were in the process of working on the Camp David accords.

GT: Sure. They thought that this would be the second Arab country, or the third because they were counting on Jordan to join, to jump together with Lebanon in Camp David. Indeed there was major miscalculation, which is being repeated now: Lebanon cannot really--which was repeated in 1982--Lebanon cannot sign a separate peace with Israel while Syria is even theoretically in a state of war, because Syria can really make the peace inoperative in Lebanon through creating the necessary problems.

JK: OK. So, even today, the linkage with the Golan Heights...

GT: The linkage today is stronger than it was in 1982, stronger than it was in 1978.

JK: We'll move forward to today and then the analysis of today a little bit later, but I still wanted to work on the past and what was going on.

GT: On the past, there is something that I cannot ignore, which is what some commentators on UN affairs have called a 'UN public opinion.' The UN is ultimately a

community of ambassadors and specialists and the Secretariat. And it is often ridiculed by commentators, the press would sometimes give it only three lines coverage and sometimes it is flashed headlines. UN public opinion was very much in favor of Lebanon, and very much moved by our action, and by the fact that for the first time there was a forthcoming, strongly expressed, clearly stated Lebanese opinion which did not go for any blah-blah-blah--there was no 'vehemently condemns' or 'strongly condemns Israel for an act of aggression...' None of that bullshit. The resolution is very simply. This is the first resolution against Israel with no condemnation of Israel. So, this was read as accepting the objective reality, that Israel maybe did this in self-defense, yet it is highly illegal and highly reprehensible. So, why? Because if we had said 'condemn', the word condemn spells a veto by the Americans, the Americans are not prepared to vote any resolution that condemns Israel. I had them later to vote resolutions that condemned Israel but not as often as Arabs would want.

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JK: OK. So in order to get this resolution passed and not have it subject to a US veto, you had to have that language.

GT: The simple words and no rhetoric, action-oriented, serving an objective purpose, which is laying one step towards peace and giving a means of implementation for what was decided. Not really a Platonic resolution saying, "everybody goes home, you withdraw, and goodbye, we have voted." No. We could have done that, and not sent the troops, but that would have meant continuing the Israeli occupation, and more than there was, and continued warfare. I use the word again--no Platonic resolution has enough

leverage and enough clout to make any pressure, whether it is Israel or anybody, to withdraw. I mean, they don't withdraw and you simply call upon them to withdraw. You have to...

JK: ... have some leverage.

GT: Yes, have some leverage, and have the instrument to confirm withdrawal. So, in the mandate of the UN force, which was there to confirm the withdrawal of Israel--now confirm is not just go and see and say, "Yes, they are withdrawing," but really create the instrument of withdrawal.



JK: In order to get a resolution to pass the Security Council you have to have a majority of nine, but in this case you had unanimous with a couple who were not voting-- did you have to work on delegations? Did you meet with them and discuss the issue and explain the issue?

GT: Yes, plenty of caucusing, yes. Of course.

JK: Yes, caucusing.

GT: Endless hours, sleepless nights. Given the time difference between Beirut and New York I was communicating with Beirut all night because it was day here, and working on delegates all the day.

JK: Meeting behind the scenes with...

GT: Going to see them, visit them individually, talk to them, take a piece of paper and see what they want, what can they live with. The wording is very important. This is a kingdom of words. A comma is important.

JK: Yes, even a comma is important.

GT: Yes. And the Russians, my God, are so difficult.

JK: Now, it was Ambassador Oleg Troyanovsky.

GT: Troyanovsky. He was very gentle. Knowing some history of Russia, I established a very agreeable communication with him. I all the time asked him about his ancestors, who rebelled against the Tsar in the December revolution, who were sent to Siberia. He said, "I don't know if any of them were Troyanovsky's." Once I encouraged him to go to the opera to watch a Lebanese ballet dancer. He said, "I don't know of any Lebanese ballet dancer." I said, "Yes you do." He said, "Who is that?" I said, "This is Natalia..." She was a Russian who chose freedom and who married a Lebanese--the most famous ballerina at that time, Natalia... oh, I forget. And he laughed and said "Ambassador, you can easily recognize the reasons why I have not seen her."

JK: Right, right. That kind of dialogue in the diplomatic world is very important.

GT: Yes, a community is born there. This is why I am speaking of the 'UN public opinion.' Maybe I should speak of the 'UN society.' We were more or less staying together. Of course, not the 107 ambassadors, but I had somehow, with my wife--and Brian Urquhart talked about that in his memoirs--we established... I wasn't all the time crusading for Arab causes and what not, and boring them. I talked about art to them, literature, plead my country's culture, history, our hopes for peace, our European mentality, as well. We are not 'Arabs,' you know, as you would say, to coin the phrase.

JK: Those kinds of things were important, because you needed the Russians not to veto.

GT: Yes, of course. I needed the Russians all the time.

[end of tape 1, side 1]

[beginning of tape 1, side 2]

GT: I needed the Russians all the time. I knew when they would not come along, except I would play the game; I would try to persuade them. I offered him, in the middle of a meeting once, a translation in Russian of Kahlil Gibran, our national poet. He was touched. Besides, we were not stooges of America. Obviously we were not a client state of America. And then I knew about the Communist Party here. You have not only a free

Communist party, but three Communist parties. We have a Trotsky-ite party, we have a Communist Party, party line, and we have another Communist party, National Communist Party. They have a publishing house and they have three or four newspapers, and two magazines, and one review, et cetera. But as your closest allies, the Iraqis are associated with communists--and your Syrian protégés are not authorizing the Communist party to run. And the communists in Syria to be able to be elected to Parliament--they had one member in Parliament--have to be members of the Ba'ath association. So, you are talking about people who would preserve liberty in the Middle East and not those who wouldn't. He did not show tremendous enthusiasm, he did not applaud. But I could see that this is not talk that went unnoticed. In the middle of the Council, this was not secret, behind the scenes; no, these were speeches in the Council.



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JK: In the Security Council at the time.

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GT: Yes. This is what probably--I mean, I don't want to be flattering myself--but his is what a career diplomat would not have done, because you would never receive instructions from your government to say that. Any government is conservative, they think, "Come on now, you don't have to go into this. Just read this piece of paper, this is it."

JK: So, in your case you had that freedom.

GT: Yes.

JK: That's unique.

GT: Yes. And it wasn't all the time without some problems created, but having retained my paper and my political allies, I have leverage with the government, as well. And this is why I sold very easily the idea of getting troops to come, and the House of Parliament ultimately came up with a splendid unanimity vote that bridged the gap. And this issue of not having blue helmets in the Lebanon failed completely. And not only that, later--because there is something in 426 in the report by the Secretary-General saying that "no agreements entered into by the Lebanese government which might conflict with the present resolution are binding"--so we read this to mean that the Cairo agreement was not to remain in effect. And to make it really clear, I communicated with members of Parliament and the Speaker of the House of Parliament, and we had a unanimous resolution in the House of Parliament, stating verbatim, what was there, that "no agreement concluded between the Lebanese government and any party or faction in the south that contradicts the spirit and letter of Resolution 425 was to remain in effect, or to be binding." So, we really canceled this.

JK: I see, so that was the point of that...

GT: Yes. So, there was politics, the politics of diplomacy.

JK: OK, so that your experience and links with the Parliament also played into this.

GT: Parliament, public opinion, newspaper headlines, press conferences, speaking on the radio from there, shuttling all the time.

JK: Yes. So, you must have been exhausted: 24-hour days, or 26-hour days!

GT: I find it easier to do than the conventional diplomat would have, because I don't know whether you know about newspapermen but they are human beings that seem to think that they have to work 24 hours. Things don't happen if they are not looking at them.



JK: That's right, that's right. You have to be awake or ready to go.

GT: Sure. We will have to disband in 10 minutes, maximum.

JK: OK. At any rate, this is going very well. I wanted to ask you about the implementation of the mandate for the UNIFIL force, because when Dag Hammarskjöld created peacekeeping, he laid down some principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, self-defense and so forth.

GT: Yes, yes, yes.

JK: Was the implementation...

GT: I thought I had given you my speeches on these. They are very elaborate discussions of this. But let me in a nutshell say two things that were frustrating. A) I think there was a basic mistake--and I will move from the particular to the general--the basic mistake was that the commander of the force decided to establish his headquarters in Israel, and was living, really, in an ambiance of Israeli... the Israelis are very good at that--"ils sont chambrire" as we would say in French. They had greater influence on him that we had. And whereas he was there to defend us, he ended up by being very lenient to the Israelis. This is the particular. General Erksine, and I told him that. But the general fact is that those forces are always very conservative in the interpretation of their mandate. And one of the issues that came up over and over again, every time we wanted to renew the mandate, was the use of force in self-defense, and what do we mean by 'self-defense.' Finally, I had them enter a half-sentence in one of the resolutions saying "it being meant--by 'self-defense' --to use force against all the parties who use force to prevent the UN force from performing its mandate." But forget it. It was never applied. They never shot.

JK: As far as the contributing troops, they still didn't want to interpret it that way?

GT: Yes. Even when UN soldiers were shot at and killed, and they lost a number of soldiers. They never shot back; they never shot. So, the conservative interpretation of the mandate, they would always tell you "oh, this is going to enter Chapter VII." Now, the difference between Chapter VI and Chapter VII need not be a war in Iraq. With the war

in Iraq, Chapter VII is a very easy thing, but I mean there has to be a major decision of the members of the Security Council. No member of the Security Council wanted, really, to go to war against Israel. And the most--how should I say?--the most frustrating thing was in 1982 when Israel walked through the UN force and there wasn't even a show of honor. I mean, we didn't expect, we didn't think that UNIFIL would barrage and shoot at the Israelis and say, "You can't cross." But at least theoretically, say, "You can't cross our lines." And then the Israelis say, "We cross by force." And they go in. So, the term 'consent of the parties' here was interpreted in a revolting manner. The Israelis did not consent to the presence of the force, but the force consented to being thrown out by the Israelis, who just walked through, without even shooting at the force, without even using force against the force. I'm not sure they told them to go home. So, this I think is a major flaw, a major weakness, and a major source of frustration, for those who defend small countries such as mine. Now, this is one observation, a major observation.

The second major observation is that the Security Council has to be reformed, and I am glad that Boutros-Ghali, when he proposed reforms to, maybe not to the Charter, but to modes of operation. Real meetings of the Security Council are the consultations, when they caucus and decide what to do. And the official meeting is really a chamber of debate, public debate. It is not a debate; they come and read speeches that are object-less.

JK: The decisions are made...

GT: The decisions are made outside. And in the consultation the parties to the dispute are not apprised. So, I was very frustrated because I could not get into the consultations,

and tried to plead what I wanted to plead with the members present. Now, this reduces the power of conviction and the capacity of being convinced by the members of the Security Council, not the states but the Ambassadors. Normally, you have to convince the capitals. So, why do we have the Security Council? The Security Council became simply a forum, not of consultation, not of negotiations, but simply a formal meeting place.

JK: Where those things are registered.

GT: Where they are registered, exactly. Whereas negotiations are taking place [elsewhere]. So, it isn't a Congress of Vienna. It isn't a Congress of Versailles. It isn't a place where you negotiate things. And I spoke very often, publicly--and I will send you a speech or have my assistant give you speech which I like very much, which I delivered in New York at St. John the Divine, the cathedral--where I expressed what a small nation hopes to see in terms of reforming the Security Council, making it a more efficient instrument in the protection of peace and of redress.

JK: In 1982, you gave a speech at Harvard University in which you predicted that Israel would...

GT: ... invade Lebanon.

JK: Invade Lebanon.

GT: Yes. I didn't predict. I read the Israeli papers! The Israelis were going to invade and they were saying they were going invade all the time. We all knew that.

JK: So, it was clearly evident that that was going to happen?

GT: Yes. I have since learned something, that in February, so before April, when I spoke at Harvard--I remember that date instantly because I also wrote an article in the *New York Times* saying "It is a very strange feeling indeed to be the Ambassador of a nation about to be invaded yesterday." And I decided whether the Israelis would invade us after Camp David was implemented or before it is complete, the negotiation is complete. This was the debate that was going on inside Israel. I was reading the Israeli press. But I have learned since that President Mitterand was in Israel in February and not only was he told that the Israelis intended to invade Lebanon, but he was shown physically, in the maps, how they were going to go and where from, and what they intended to occupy. And Mr. Sharon came on television one day and showed a map, and somehow the television was cut off because he was speaking from Israel. It was duplicity, one of those talk shows on Sunday mornings. He physically unfolded the map and said "[blah blah blah]." He was shut off. I then decided to give that speech in New York.

JK: On June 4th, a couple of days before the invasion of 1982, you had informed the Security Council of the events that were taking place. How did you present that to the Council?

GT: I presented to the Council that the invasion was going to take place. And actually, Resolution 508 was a preemptive resolution. It was voted before the invasion started.

JK: Right. Just the day before, or something like that.

GT: Yes. Because there was Israeli shelling--they shelled even Beirut. And they had about 230 casualties, or whatever it was. And whoever has read military history, even the first book on military history, you know that when there is such a shelling, that even if you haven't read about troop concentration, it means that the army is preparing the way, shelling where it is going to invade.

JK: So, by bringing about Security Council Resolution 508 you were hoping to get some kind of action to stop...

GT: Yes. Preventive action.

JK: Some preventive action. That didn't work.

GT: You know the end of the story.

JK: Yes, the end of the story. On June 6th, Israel launched the full attack.

GT: Yes. The most important thing that I want to emphasize here, which is pertinent to any history that one would one-day research, is that the Israelis told the Americans a very bold and flagrant lie. They had assured the Americans that they would go only for 30 miles or whatever it is. The 30-mile line. When they got to Sidon, I came to the Council, and the Council was almost sitting permanently, and said, "Look, I am speaking to you while active warfare is taking place in Sidon, and the Israelis have entered there, etc., etc." And Mrs. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, the Ambassador, who was no Andrew Young, said, "this is a lie." She used the word. I said, "You owe me an apology." She said, "I will when you prove that they are in Sidon. I think this is not true. I think we have assurances from the Israelis that they will not go as far as Sidon."

JK: Oh, my gosh. She didn't have that information?

GT: So, we adjourned for ten minutes to give her time to ascertain whether this was true or not. She went to her mission and called the State Department and the State Department told her that my information was true, and that people in the Pentagon were furious because the Israelis had told them a lie, they had told them they would not get that far and they would stop before that, and that they had not stopped. So, I saluted her courtesy because when the Council met again she said, "I owe the Lebanese Ambassador an apology. I have gone and communicated with Washington and I regret to admit that

there is active fighting taking place in Sidon and we were told a lie by the Israelis. We were promised that they would not do it. They are 'beyond the line.' And she accepted the resolution condemning Israel and asking them to stop, etc., etc.

JK: So what accounted for this discrepancy on the part of the Israelis, that they had told one thing to the Pentagon?

GT: I think Mr. Sharon had also lied to the Israeli cabinet, because later Begin said that he hadn't authorized an operation that would go as far as Beirut.

JK: OK. So, there was duplicity on many parts.



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GT: Sure.

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JK: What has been the Syrian role? Now, I know that is a big, complicated question.

GT: Yes, well--there again I want to say that I felt all along that, whereas the Syrians were, from a national point of view, playing with the Israelis, what the Israelis call 'an open-game strategy.' The Israelis wrote a marvelous study of this, saying that they and the Syrians were reading each other's signals to each other, without having to really plot. They had objectives interests that met. They had both the same interests, such as destroying Lebanon, or both being present, both justifying each other's presence, etc., etc. I don't think the Syrians really minded, even, if the Palestinians were destroyed by the

Israelis, as we have seen later, because the worst destruction of Israeli camps didn't take place by Lebanese Christian militiamen but by the Syrian army in the Lebanon. More Palestinians were killed by Syrians and Syrian-supported militias in the Lebanese war. And more Christians killed Christians than Muslims killed Christians as well.

JK: There were so many factions, such a complicated...

GT: More than factions--it is very complex. Do you read French?

JK: I don't.



GT: You don't. I would have given you a book I published in Paris in 1984, called *Une Guerre pour les Autres*. 'A War for Others,' surrogate war. The twenty years of wars that have destroyed my country were surrogate wars--we were both surrogates of others.

JK: It is good to mention these kinds things in the tape because then we will have that for people to continue further research.

GT: Yes.

New speaker/Assistant: Excuse me. This is an old copy. I think we will have to put it on the computer. Anyhow, it is there.

GT: If you make a photocopy of this...

Assistant: This is what I did, now. A photocopy, better than the one you have. So, it has to go on the computer. But it could be ready.

JK: Thank you. Alright, I'm not sure how much more time we have.

GT: I think I have to run.

JK: You have to run, because you have to go off and give a speech.



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GT: Are you going to be here tomorrow?

JK: I will be here tomorrow?

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GT: Maybe she can arrange another meeting.

JK: That would be excellent.

[continuing on March 18, 1998]

JK: This is a continuation of the interview with Ambassador Ghassan Tueni, and today is March 18th, 1998. So, we will pick up a little bit where we left off. We had discussed the UN Security Council Resolution 425 and 426 and how it came to place and your role in it. But I wanted to talk a little bit more about that and the interpretation of the mandate in 425 and 426, because while there was agreement among the Security Council on the language of the mandate, when it came to the interpretation there seem to have been different interpretations. One consisted of the role of the UN peacekeepers and their ability to use force, how that was defined. Peacekeepers act in self-defense, but was it interpreted to be self-defense simply of the UN peacekeepers or defense of the mandate? What were your expectations or the Lebanese expectations of that particular aspect of the mandate?



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GT: Well, the Lebanese expectations were that the mandate, because there is a saying there that, “the force shall operate as a unified and well-integrated force.” This spells out in military terms that this is an operative force. Hence, our concept was that the mandate was a dynamic mandate. The Secretariat had what I call a static interpretation, meaning the force is there and if somebody shoots at the force it shoots back, but this is all. We wanted the force to be really a peacekeeping force in the sense that it sees to it that the peace it kept. Now, in the Secretariat there was a nightmare remembrance of the Congo. They said “Oh, no, no. You are pushing us into becoming a peace-enforcing force. This is not a peace-enforcing mandate, this is a peacekeeping mandate.” So we would reply saying, “OK, so you peace-keep the force. You keep the peace if there is a peace. But there isn’t a peace there. So, you are there to keep the peace on the assumption that

everybody agrees--this is one of the rules that Kurt Waldheim kept repeating and which were in the guidelines. But how about somebody that has agreed to keep the peace but they don't? What do you do? You fold up and go?"

We thought that the force should really have, to put it in a nutshell, a dynamic mandate. Hence to use force, or not necessarily use it, but threaten to use it, 'force without the use of force;' you know the phrase. So that people would know that they can't get away with shooting a rocket at Israel and running away, or vice-versa: the Israelis coming in and shooting down a house or blowing up a place of the Lebanese. So, this was the main point of difference. We finally got a paragraph put in one of the resolutions, a later resolution--I don't remember exactly...



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JK: 427?

GT: No, much later.

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JK: Much later?

GT: Yes, a year later. And we agreed to bring in a contingent of the Lebanese army to serve with UNIFIL, so that this would be the first step in enabling the Lebanese army to take over, which was within the guidelines of the force, namely Resolution 426, the Report of the Secretary-General which was confirmed by Resolution 426. Now, when we decided to move that contingent, both the Israelis and the Palestinians opposed it, and the Americans ran in desperately saying, "Come on, stop it. You are going to ignite a whole

war.” We were not able to move from one part of another within our territory. The mandate of UNIFIL soon became so static that UNIFIL was defending itself, and not too well really because it lost a lot of casualties, and not progressing. It became part of the panorama here, and we reached a state of a standstill force, and hence confirming the occupation of part of Lebanon, the so-called ‘security belt,’ instead of seeing to it that the withdrawal took place. To this, we tried once to remedy by asking that the force should be given a political dimension, hence that the force should have a political mediator or a negotiator, who would move on behalf of both the Security Council and the force, negotiating back and forth between the Lebanese and the Israelis, and the Palestinians if necessary, to convince everybody to keep peace to such a point, such a degree that the Israelis would withdraw. And this was when Israeli ‘*arriere pensées*’ --how to you say that in English, I don’t know--hidden motives, became apparent. They didn’t want to withdraw. They simply didn’t want to withdraw and they were using this piece of real estate they called the ‘security belt’ or whatever it is, not to protect their security--because it proved useless, they were under still more attacks because their presence was provocative. The whole theory of defending Israeli security of northern Galilee from occupied Lebanon failed miserably. They wanted to use this to start the whole drama that was taking place, dividing the country and what not. This was their ulterior motive. This is the word I was looking for.

JK: Now, what would they have to gain from that?

GT: Well, precisely. What do they have to gain from destabilizing the whole area? Israel is out for supremacy. Israel is out for supremacy in the Middle East, and the destruction of the Arabs. Not for peace. So far, even speaking today and reading what is happening and the way the British Foreign Secretary was received by Mr. Netanyahu yesterday, and the fact that Rabin was assassinated--all these are proofs that the Israelis were not really interested in peace. Or probably, that they were divided on the peace issue. There are some genuinely peace-minded Israelis. We don't doubt it. But they have not been able to really run and govern Israel in that direction. The only time we got anywhere near that was under Rabin and Perez, and you see what happened. Even the Oslo agreement, which is considered by Arab opinion as a betrayal by the Palestinians, Mr. Netanyahu doesn't want to implement it. So, you have to read what was happening in southern Lebanon in the light of what has been revealed later by Israeli policy.

JK: Now, what do you think that UNIFIL might have been able to do in a more dynamic way? Because the balance is somewhat difficult, to maintain a kind of stability and to maintain impartiality, but still be able to deter or demobilize forces in the region.

GT: I think there is a paradox initially. Peacekeeping is maintaining peace between two warring parties. The Lebanese were not as such at war with Israel. Those who were at war with Israel were the Palestinians. Yet the Palestinians did not have recognition from the Israelis in a manner that would enable them to be a party to a peacekeeping agreement. So, UNIFIL was there under false assumptions. Unless we interpret the mandate the way we interpreted it, that they were here in Lebanon to pacify or help pacify

a Lebanese territory in such a manner that it would never be, or would not be, a source of warfare or war-like activities or revolutions, or whatever you want, neither against the Lebanese or against the Israelis. This is why they were all the time moving in twilight diplomacy, in the zones of twilight. They were talking to the Palestinians but calling them 'armed elements,' not saying 'the Palestinians.' They had no recognition. And talking about the stooges and surrogates of the Israelis, namely the army and whatnot, as 'de facto forces'--or vice versa, I don't recall. Now, all those semantic niceties do not give you, really, solutions. They allow you to navigate between waters but not really to reach solutions. Could we hope for a peace-enforcing force? I don't think we could, probably not. Looking at it, the Israelis wanted to destroy, maybe not Lebanon--we think they wanted--but surely to destroy the Palestinians. And 425 was not a resolution declaring peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. So, this is the real paradox.


JK: And then you have the issue of the countries that are contributing the forces and under what conditions would they be willing?

GT: They weren't willing to send an army to fight against Israel, nor fight against the Palestinians. They were ready to send contingents who would really help establish peace, if peace was wanted. Now, the Palestinians were saying that they wanted peace. OK, they wanted peace but they wanted their country back. As long as Israel was not giving them their country back, or whatever part of that country, they thought that this notion that I mentioned yesterday of a diaspora in revolt, they were in revolt. And UNIFIL did not have the mandate to, how you say, quell or quench that revolt.

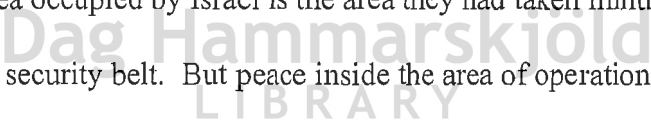
JK: Yes. The other aspect of the implementation of 425 and 426 was actually the location of the deployments of the forces, and there were different interpretations. The Security Council had an interpretation, the PLO, the Israelis, and Lebanese. What were some of the debates? You were in the UN at the time: what was it that the Security Council was advocating?

GT: I'm not sure I got you properly. I'm sorry.

JK: The deployment of the force. Where they would go...



GT: Yes, the area. Yes. Well, it is stated clearly in the report of the Secretary-General, Resolution 426, that the area of deployment would be the area that was occupied by Israel. Now, the area occupied by Israel is the area they had taken minus what was left, namely minus the security belt. But peace inside the area of operations, as it was called, was threatened from behind the blue line, namely the northern border of the area occupied or used as the area of operations of UNIFIL. There was a sort of no-mans-land, which was under the control of nobody except the extremist factions of the Palestinians who, in the first place, never subscribed to 425, and we all the time wanted, the Lebanese, to try to either get the Arab deterrent forces to move southward until the green line, as we called it, namely the border of the area of operations of the Arab deterrent force, would meet with the blue line, namely the northern border of the area of operations of UNIFIL. But the Arab deterrent forces wouldn't move because they didn't want to clash with the



extremist Palestinians. We tried to get UNIFIL to move northward, and hence control that area, but they wouldn't. The Americans said, "We'll try, we are trying." And the Soviets said, "Oh no, we will veto." We tried to increase the force, and when we had a sensible increase by Resolution 425, six months after the force was deployed. But once we wanted a real, substantive increase, to go into what was called the 'pancake' and get that area under control, the Soviets again threatened to veto. So, there was there a clear indication, or a clear determination, to allow the extremists to go on threatening the peace. So, UNIFIL decided, "OK, now we settle. We give security to the people in the area. They are developing, they live in peace, they are going back to their houses, they are going back to work--and we forget about the rest and wait." And they went on waiting until Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982.



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JK: Now, you said that the Soviets continued to indicate that they would veto further deployment.

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GT: Further deployment and further increases.

JK: Why was that? Was that because of their...

GT: Because the extremists were their clients, and because the Cold War was reinstated. The Gromyko-Vance honeymoon lasted only a month or two, not really, and the Cold War went on. The Lebanon was one of the most favored theaters of the Cold War. The only theater where violence was taking place between Russian, Soviet clients--

extremists and communists and whatnot and revolutionaries of all sorts, some of them legitimate but not if we think that they have subscribed to a peacekeeping force--and the Americans who were the authors of Resolution 425. And the Americans were happy to get rid, in 1982, of the paternity of Resolution 425. They stopped mentioning, even the three figures: '425' would never appear in American language, and they brought in the multi-national force with an American contingent, which was a disaster.

JK: Yes, I'm glad you brought that up, because I wanted to ask you what was the Lebanese view of the multi-national force coming in?

GT: Well, the Lebanese government agreed to the multi-national force, of course, and was made to request it. And I insist it was 'made to.' It was offered in such a manner that, given the division in Lebanon, the powers that were, agreed: thinking that the multi-national would be a better protection. And we are talking not in terms of southern Lebanon, but in terms of the Israelis occupying Beirut, or rather the vicinity of Beirut. The Americans had gotten them to move out of Beirut, and they were up as far as the boundaries of the presidential palace in B'abda. And the multi-national force got there, it got the Palestinians out, established peace, relative peace, in the camps after there was this butchery of people--since we mentioned the names earlier, a witness to Sabra and Shatila, 1200 people were slain, brutally, by Israeli stooges and probably under the eyes of Sharon, if we are to believe the Israeli investigation committee which made Sharon resign. Sharon was hiding the whole time things from Begin and this is probably what brought Begin down; he didn't want to go.

JK: Right, you had mentioned before, yesterday, the whole goal of the 1982 attack perhaps had been hidden from Begin.

GT: Yes, it was hidden from Begin. This was hidden from Begin--the butchery of Sabra and Shatila was hidden from Begin. A number of things, and maybe, maybe, even the very close relationship that took place, that was established between Sharon and the Lebanese forces, the so-called Lebanese forces, which was the Christian extremists who were surrogates of Israel.

JK: Now, as long as we are talking about Sabra and Shatila...



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GT: And whose representative, Mr. Bashir Gemayel, was elected president in the shadow of Israeli tanks... the shadow government by Israeli tanks.

JK: When you were talking about the attack on the two camps, the Israelis claimed that they didn't know what was going on, and that they didn't anticipate that anything like that could happen.

GT: Well, they claimed, but the investigation led by the Israeli magistrate proved the contrary. I think this is settled.

JK: You mentioned their stooges...

GT: Yes, their stooges, and Mr. Sharon and probably some of his officers were present there. We know the exact place, the building, on top of which they were watching down on Sabra and Shatila, an eye-view. And this is all established by an Israeli investigation, a judicial investigation.

JK: How long did the killing go on?

GT: Two days. Two or three days.

JK: So, if they had seen it, they had time to respond and stop it.

GT: Respond, yes. They pretended they stopped it, but when they stopped it was already done.

JK: We had started talking about the multi-national force, I wanted to ask you some more about it, how the Lebanese felt about it. You said they had welcomed them under some pressure?

GT: Yes. And it ceased being operational as well, and the multi-national force was defending its own security rather than defending the people in the country. While the multi-national force was here, the Lebanon was being shelled by the Syrians, and once or twice the others replied, "Stop the shelling," but they didn't stop the war. The war was

going on. And it appeared later by various seminars and meetings that took place that there wasn't too much harmony between the various forces. The Italians didn't know what the hell the Americans were up to; the Americans were afraid to tell the French what they were doing; the French wanted to have their way; and the British had a contingent of 100 people just to raise the flag. So, it wasn't the well-integrated, unified force that we thought it would be, which UNIFIL was, to some extent. They came on the assumption that UNIFIL was not militarily capable, these were the big boys, et cetera. So, they proved to be much less credible because they were attacked ferociously and they lost in one night more men, tens of times more men, than UNIFIL had lost in years.

JK: When the truck rammed into...



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GT: Yes, the two trucks hit simultaneously. The French command post and an American post.

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JK: Now, you mentioned that the Syrians...

GT: And after that they left, they quit, and delivered their positions to the 'enemy,' to the factions that were fighting the government. The airport was delivered to Amal by the Americans, and the French...

JK: You mean officially? Handed it over?

GT: More or less.

JK: Or just by leaving they ...

GT: No, there was some arrangement, because they simultaneously left and the others came and took over. Not that they would have trouble coming and taking it by force. If the Lebanese army had come it would have been probably present but then it would have ignited a war. Yet this war was ignited anyway, so it is a zero-sum game.

JK: Now, you mentioned that the Syrians had been attacking.

GT: Yes.

JK: What was the goal of the Syrian barrage?

GT: Ask them.

JK: Ask them!

GT: They wanted to establish peace in Lebanon, they said.

JK: I see, ok. Now, as long as we are talking about the Syrians, they had entered in 1976 initially, and were part of what then became called the Arab League...



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GT: The Arab deterrent force.

JK: The Arab deterrent force.

GT: Which didn't deter much. On the contrary, from peacekeepers they soon became a party to the hostilities, and there was ferocious shelling of East Beirut by the Syrians, by the Arab deterrent force, which necessitated the intervention of the Security Council and Resolution 436, in 1978 to call for a cease-fire and an American intervention, with the Soviets, to get the Syrians to stop.



JK: OK. By intervention, you mean political intervention.

GT: Political intervention.

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JK: So, you were at the UN at that point?

GT: I was at the UN, yes.

JK: Were there discussions at the UN regarding that?

GT: Sure, of course, of course. Plenty of discussions. It happened while the General Assembly was meeting in 1978, and every single speaker spoke about it, and in more or

less either emotional or violent terms, regretting or condemning or calling on or asking for, etc., etc. I myself delivered what I thought was a very good speech saying how we should really review the mandate of the Arab deterrent force and how Lebanon had become a theater of surrogate wars and every possible crisis. I had a conversation with Mr. Waldheim who mentioned to me, often, often by name. I remember distinctly the very first time I saw him, he said, "Lebanon was the theater of all the wars produced by the lack of peace in the Middle East."

[end of tape 1, side 2]

[tape 2, side 1]



GT: This is where all the wars are waged, physically, and often by Lebanese proxies.

JK: Did you have discussions with Ambassador Andrew Young at that time?

GT: I'm not sure Ambassador Young was still there when we voted Resolution 436, but I know that Cy Vance came down to New York and the French Foreign Minister was there. There was no Soviet Foreign Minister at the time there, but there was a lot of caucusing between the major powers and finally Resolution 436 was voted unanimously, including the Russians.

JK: Including the Russians?

GT: Yes. At a meeting of the Security Council that lasted exactly six minutes, because they all agreed to drop their speeches, have no debate, and just vote the resolution. And the French were chairing, the president presiding on the Security Council.

[interrupted]

GT: The French, who were presiding over the Security Council for that month, used the privilege of the chair to call for a meeting without a request from the government concerned. So, I could not get in touch with the government, all communications were broken, the President of the Republic was living in a shelter in the Palace. The Palace was shelled. Everything was disrupted. Finally I wrote a letter saying that my general mandate authorized me if need be to ask for a meeting, and I gave that letter to the President, who agreed not to use it unless his prerogative to call for the Council was challenged. And there was no challenge, everyone accepted that the President should go on to call the Security Council because this was a case which threatened international peace and security in the area, because of its international implications regionally. It was quite hell, you know, very rough for a few days, a lot of casualties.

JK: So, was the implementation of that decision effective? Was the shelling stopped?

GT: Immediately. But of course the Syrians have always claimed that there was a cease-fire not because the Security Council decided so. It was reached before the Security Council by a personal contact between the two presidents--which is a lie.

President Assad was in Moscow; and our president was in the shelter. And our president was trying all the time to call Assad with no success, requesting for a summit meeting. Assad would not respond and in the meantime I suspect that Washington called Moscow on the red line and said that this atrocity must end.

JK: OK--and then Moscow called Damascus.

GT: Yes. Well, they didn't need to call him, because he was right there. Assad was in Moscow.

JK: Assad was in Moscow, ok.



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GT: Yes. So, he came right back and President Gemayel went to Damascus--on that very night, six hours after the Security Council.

JK: So then they met?

GT: Yes. There were two cease-fires--the cease-fire of the Security Council and the cease-fire of the summit between the two presidents.

JK: That's a very good clarification.

GT: But the reality was never made clear, and the point became academic. The fact is that there was a cease-fire.

JK: Yes, in fact there was a cease-fire.

GT: And a redeployment of the Syrian forces.

JK: And then in 1983, President Amin Gemayel sent you to the UN. What was the nature of that mission?

GT: The nature of that mission--which turned short--was to try and secure and to line up Security Council support for Lebanon to take action to stop Syrian aggression, or acts of Syrian aggression direct or indirect. We had proof, we had aerial photographs. So, I went there and contacted everybody, and we started proceedings and then I regret to say--this was a very frustrating day--the ambassadors of the five powers all told me that this was a non-starter, they were not going to vote a resolution against the Syrians. They all told it more or less politely, the curtest reply was the British: "Ghassan, why don't you go to Damascus and get things straightened out with the Syrians." I said, "Thank you. If we could, we would have done it. We didn't come here to get this advice."

JK: Were you requesting UN troops to be deployed?

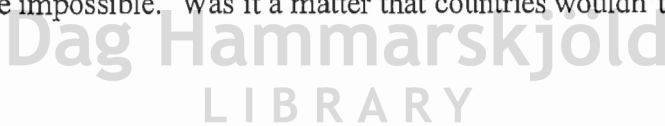
GT: We weren't requesting anything. Not specifically. We were requesting a UN intervention to bring forth a cessation of hostilities and giving the Secretary-General the right to come back to the Council if he wanted, or without coming back to the Council, deploy peacekeeping troops where it was necessary. Because the Security Council had already given a mandate to the Secretary-General, which he did not use. In an earlier resolution, the Council had given the Secretary-General the right to, if he found the situation to be deteriorating, to call for the formation of a peacekeeping force, and bring physically troops to negotiate the cessation of hostilities. Which he didn't do.

JK: He didn't do it.



GT: No, he thought it was impossible.

JK: It would be impossible. Was it a matter that countries wouldn't contribute the troops?



GT: Well, no. Not contributors--but contributors as members of the Security Council had their say, not that they were particularly concerned about the fate of their troops but they were concerned about the whole issue of what the Security Council could do.

JK: Could do. OK. There have been many players in events in Lebanon.

GT: Yes.

JK: It's very complicated for a outsider. And we talked about the, to a certain extent, Syria's role. Could you--I know it is hard to explain all of this in one interview--but could you explain to a certain degree the role of the French?

GT: The role of the French. The French wanted to play a role but didn't want to pay the tab. So, once in the very beginning, they were the first contingent to get there, but once they had their first clash with the Palestinians in Tyre and a colonel was wounded, and what not, they started planning their pull-out. Finally, they didn't want to really pull out completely, so being the most important contingent, they came down to being concerned with logistics purely and later with the kitchen and anyway, logistics and intendance.

JK: Did they end up becoming a target?

GT: They probably had been threatened. The political interpretation is more complex than what I have said. It was... everyone was to defend Lebanon against the Palestinians, and against the Israelis. In fact, they were lucky if they could merely defend the policy vis-a-vis the Israelis. DeGaulle had done that; when DeGaulle was alive he had done that for a long time. But to defend Lebanon against the Palestinians, would imperil their chances to follow a pro-Arab policy in other Arab states where the Palestinians were more popular than the Lebanese. And we came up with this conclusion, which is very much a lesson of wisdom: never ask the Arabs to choose between the Palestinians and

the Lebanese--they will choose the Palestinians, whoever is responsible. We knew if you went to an Arab court of justice or an Arab mediator or an Arab assembly of foreign ministers or whatever it is, and say, "Look, we have a problem with the Palestinians." They would always end lean on the part of the Palestinians, on behalf of the Palestinians, or never really proclaim the Palestinians guilty. And if you go to a conventional body and ask them to choose between the Lebanon and Arab states, then they are necessarily pro-Arab because they have more interests with the Arabs than they have interests with the Lebanese. Lebanon does not weigh sufficiently in the balance. And to make Lebanon weigh in the balance, we had probably to follow a diplomacy that isn't our style, which is brinkmanship.



JK: Brinkmanship.

GT: Yes. Namely, create more problems. Not being able to present an advantage, if we represent a serious international problem then probably we could prevail. But we could neither be a major problem--we were a major problem before Resolution 425 or in 1982, because of Israel and because of their needs--but to represent a major interest for which the world would be concerned against either the Arabs or the Palestinians: no way.

JK: Now, you mentioned that the Arabs would choose the Palestinian case over the Lebanese.

GT: Sure.

JK: Why is that?

GT: Because there is a certain sacrality to the Palestinian case, because probably of solidarity, because the Palestinians are the underdogs, they are persecuted, and they can easily play underdogs with Lebanon: they are underdogs and they are persecuted in Lebanon. They needed to enjoy freedom in fighting Israel and to win back their land. Which is a popular case, but I mean, this is not the case.

JK: Was the French role complicated by its history here in Lebanon?

GT: Yes, but not in the way you assume.

JK: I mean, as Lebanon being more or less a colony, as the colonial power.

GT: No, there was... well, the French, they were cured from having been the colonizing power. They continued to have a certain affection and love, and yet a love-hate relationship because they resented our independence. It is easy for them to say, "OK, you kicked us out, and you see what has happened to you."

JK: OK. What has been the role of Iran in this situation?

GT: Of who?

JK: Iran.

GT: Iran. Well, in the beginning, Iran was very positive, the first 50 men who came were an Iranian little detachment of UNTSO, the UN observers, the Golan Heights, they came down to help. Later when Khomeini took over Iran, it became the great spearhead of the Islamic movement and they took over for the Palestinians. So, there was a phase where they were supporting the Palestinians and the Arab nationalists against the Lebanon as such, and certainly against the Lebanese Christians who were fighting stupidly a war that they should have never waged. And then later, of course, Iran's major chips in the Middle East settlement are in Lebanon, it's their role behind Hezbollah. They will never tell Hezbollah to call off, forgetting the past, what do they call off Hezbollah for? What do you give them? What do the Americans give them? A bigger mission? Negotiations? Any safe conduct to the future? A certificate of good behavior? I don't know.

JK: What do they gain in the situation by supporting the Hezbollah? What does Iran gain?

GT: Go and ask the philosophers of the Iranian revolution. They gain tremendous prestige and nuisance power. They have become a player well beyond their borders, whereas the American policy is a policy of containment of Iran, they are containing Iran

on its borders but Iran is present far away on the borders of the American's ally, Israel. So, the Iranians became via Hezbollah the principle enemy. They still are.

JK: OK. We have talked to a degree about the external players and supporting nations and different factions. What are the major internal groups? And I know that you have written quite a bit about this and you might just...

GT: I think this takes us beyond 425.

JK: Beyond, yes.



GT: Nothing that we would say in a few minutes would be any good.

JK: Would work. Yes, but you have written several things on this, but could you just for the record maybe mention a few that...

GT: I would say that I have written a major book, which I consider a major book, called in French *Une Guerre pour les Autres*, 'Surrogate Wars,' which was published in France by Jean-Claude Lattes in 1984. It is out of stock now. It described the wars and did a very good analysis, which I thought was a very good analysis.

JK: Is it only in French? Or has it been translated?

GT: In French.

JK: It has not been translated into English?

GT: No. It was translated but not published.

JK: It was translated into English but not published?

GT: Not published, yes. Because by the time we finished the translation, it was overtaken by some events. It had to be updated and I didn't have time to update it. Not that I am lazy, but the daily agendas...



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JK: Do you have the manuscript in English though?

GT: I should have it somewhere.

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JK: Somewhere. So someone might be able to do research with that?

GT: Yes. Sure.

JK: Because all this would be used for research, it is important to get that...

GT: I wrote a number of lectures and speeches that are available as well in various universities. You were asking about my journalism career, and it is probably time to conclude on this: a daily newspaper gives you a style even if you are trying to be the author of a book. It is not like being a correspondent when you come back from where you were and write a book. You are still running a daily show, which is a daily newspaper, in the middle of tremendous events. Even if you go to the UN and come back, your main struggle is back at home. And this time it goes back 50 years to the time Israel became a state and waged tremendous war internally in the Lebanon. This was the platform of the national opposition in 1952, which succeeded in really running the only white revolution in the Middle East--whereas all the capitals in the Middle East were turning in the wake of the Israeli victory in 1967, all the countries were undergoing military coup-d'états and turning into military governments, this was the only country where you called for a general strike. And I was myself a member of the opposition in the House, we were a group of eight out of 77 members of Parliament, and we forced the President to resign and elected one of us... the same Parliament where we had a minority, ran it with public opinion. Before that I had gone a number of times to jail.

JK: Yes. Explain that a little bit.

GT: Well, 'explain that'--I was writing articles that the government thought were a violation of the law, and because of their violence and violence of criticism, and I went to jail. I seemed to have remained nostalgic because back in 1972 a President under whom I had served as a Minister and Deputy Speaker under a different Prime Minister, thought

my opposition was becoming too violent and he sent me jail. I only stayed 21 days. But I mean, in the Third World, if you haven't gone to jail, you are not really anybody.

JK: It is a measure of your status.

GT: Well, anyway. Yes.

JK: I know that you have an appointment, and I think that we should conclude.

GT: Yes. We must.



JK: Thank you so very much. UNITED NATIONS

GT: This was a pleasure. It was an invitation to reminisce. I must rather write a book in English, now that I am getting ready to retire. But you never retire from such jobs.

JK: Thank you very much.

Yale-UN Oral History Project

Ghassan Tueni

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

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